SARON MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Saron Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCA)
510 Main Street
St. Joseph, MI 49085

Website: www.saronlutheran.org
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
Phone: 269-983-1273
Facebook:www.facebook.com/saronlutheranchurchst.joseph

Saron's Mission: ***Joyfully sharing God's love for all!!!***

Reverend James E. Smith, Pastor
Cell: 269-816-3870
Email: pastorjames@saronlutheran.org

Amanda Bradley, Communications Director
Cell: 419-306-5780
Email: info@saronlutheran.org
bradley717@gmail.com

Marcus Roll, Music Director
Email: roll.marcus17@gmail.com

Beth Gray, Organist/Pianist
Email: egrayroll@gmail.com

Ken Boyd, Bookkeeper
Email: financial@saronlutheran.org

Mackenzie Dressander, Nursery Director
Email: mackenzie.trail99@gmail.com

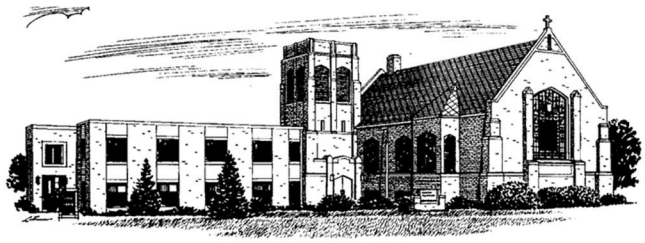
Typical Sunday at Saron:

Fall, Winter and Spring **(through May 17, 2026):**
8:30am Worship On-Location
9:40am-10:30am Adult Bible Study
10am-10:45am Learning Hour for Ages 3-8th Grade
11am Worship with Zoom Option
Nursery Available

Summer Schedule (**begins May 24, 2026**):
10am Worship
On-Location and via Zoom
Nursery Available
No Learning Hour

We hold in prayer:
The Rev. Yehiel Curry,
Presiding Bishop, ELCA
The Rev. Julie Schneider-Thomas, Bishop of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, ELCA
The Episcopal Diocese of the Great Lakes

Our Companion Synods:
Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras
Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea
Lutheran Church of Latvia



Who is Excited for Lent? I am!!!

And a phenomenal slate of Gospel readings is a big reason why. On March 1, we will hear Jesus's encounter with the Pharisee Nicodemus at night, maybe most famous for giving us the verse of John 3:16. On March 8, we will hear the story of Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, in which Jesus promises to give her "living water." On March 15, Jesus, who is the "light of the world" heals the vision of the man born blind. On the 22, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

What I love about all these passages is that they are very intimate encounters. Sure, there are onlookers, and other people experience the fruit (or sometimes fallout!) of these Jesus encounters. But they are mostly Jesus meeting an individual where they are and empowering them to live in a different way than they knew was possible.

Nicodemus was challenged to be born from above. The woman at the well was welcomed to drop her bucket and seek the water that never fails. The man born blind was chosen to reveal God's goodness and glory to those who claim they can already see. And Lazarus, well, does it get more life-changing than being raised from the tomb after four days? I imagine he is one of the only humans who never questioned Jesus's claim "I am the resurrection and the life."

This is where the church and Saron, specifically, comes in. We are so blessed in that we are called to be a place where people encounter Jesus. Read that again. Whoa!

What an awesome responsibility and what an awesome privilege. Because Jesus changes lives.

And so we feed people. We teach and discuss. We pray. We lament and rejoice. We hope. Most basically, we gather for worship. And people encounter Jesus: both all-together and one-at-a-time. People encounter Jesus, and Jesus changes lives. You can't put a price on that.

And so as we head into Lent, I want to thank you. For your attendance of worship and other activities, for your volunteering, for your financial support, for your prayers. Let's continue to be a place where everyone and all can encounter Jesus and be changed.

Yours in Christ, Pastor James E. Smith

General Information

OFFICE HOURS

Pastor James E. Smith
Monday – Thursday
Hours may vary. Appointments are great!
Amanda Bradley (Communications Director):
Mondays & Thursdays 10am-2pm
Ken Boyd (Bookkeeper):
Thursday Mornings and by Appointment
Helping Hands Office Volunteers:
Wednesdays 9:00am-11am (approx)

If you or your loved one is need of a visit or pastoral care, please contact Pastor James at 269-816-3870.

Specific questions or concerns may be directed to an appropriate council member or committee liaison:
President – Fran Bolson
Vice President – Erik Bergh
Secretary – Isla Helmuth
Treasurer – Jamie Svab
Worship – Marilyn Frey
Learning – Chuck Knebl
Outreach – Claudia Staude & Merrily Smith
Facilities – Erik Bergh & Steve Cook
Youth – Scott Gaspari
Support – Jamie Svab
Hospitality – Merrily Smith

Caring and Sharing

Happy Birthday Wishes to Saron's Members!

3/1 Michael Hoodlebrink
3/2 Eric Perrin
3/4 Krin Jurgensen
3/4 Caleb Pudell
3/7 Pastor James Smith
3/8 Austin Kamala
3/9 Colbe Pudell
3/9 Israel Helmuth
3/10 Brad Frey
3/12 Susan Rood
3/17 Mia Bradley
3/18 Peter Johnson
3/18 Constance Slater
3/21 Kaitlin Hooper
3/22 Janet Oleson
3/25 James Nicholas
3/26 Sue Bailey
3/27 Eloise Moely
3/28 Matthew Gacek

Happy Anniversary Wishes to Saron's Members!

We don't have any anniversaries on our list for March.

If there are any omissions from the birthday or anniversary list, or if a date is incorrect, please let us know so we can get it correct in the future!

Wednesday Soup Suppers & Prayer:

We invite Saron and all Christians to join us in praying for our country, our leaders, the vulnerable, and all of God's children. Ed Staude and Pr. James will lead us through four more Wednesdays of themed prayer:
March 4, 11, 18 & 25

Soup suppers will be at 6:15pm with prayer to follow at 7pm. Please invite your family, friends, or anyone else who might find this opportunity helpful!

Use the link in the weekly email or the clipboard in the narthex to help with the meal.

Prayer Labyrinth

Our beautifully embellished canvas prayer labyrinth is once again available for walking during Lent. It is set up in the upstairs lounge with various candles to help provide an atmosphere conducive to prayer and contemplation. You may visit before or after services on Wednesdays, Sundays, or any time the building is open for various activities or Bible studies. If you aren't sure when that is or would like to come at a specific time when the building is normally locked, contact **Kathy Bergh at 906/290-3346.**

We had so much fun last year, we couldn't resist doing another chili cook-off! Don Hafer won us over this time with his traditional Texas chili. Nice job, Don! Big thank you to our 11 chili makers, all those that made bread and desserts, our enthusiastic decorators, and the clean-up crew! Team Saron is always a winner!
(P.S. We're already making plans for next year!)

Feb 8 2026

In addition to having a great time, we also used our Super Chili Bowl as an opportunity to support a group of our armed forces with donations towards welcome home care packages. We shipped 3 boxes of toiletries and treats then used the $300+ cash collected to purchase items from their Amazon and Walmart wish lists to be delivered directly to the base. Below is a note from a Saron member and the mother of one of the Marines:

Dearest Saron Lutheran Family,

We are deeply grateful for your prayers and support for our Marines, Sailors and their families. Your generosity is truly a blessing to the Combat Logistics Battalion 26 Camp Lejeune community and the military families as they prepare for an upcoming homecoming celebration.

-Kim Perrin

Help Us Celebrate Easter! Our Easter Vigil is at 6pm on Saturday, April 4, and we need your help to make it extra special!

- We want your pictures of creation for our Genesis 1 slideshow that will run during the first reading. These can include photos of family, pets, favorite places in nature, or wildlife. Photos can be dropped off at church office or sent to info@saronlutheran.org.
- We are also looking for donations for our "New Creation" Snack Bar, such as packs of seeds to plant in home gardens and goodies (fresh-baked especially but all goodies welcome)! Seed packs can be dropped off to Pr. James. Goodies appreciated closer to the big day!

Springtime Thoughts on Stewardship

Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

Time & talents. Each of us brings something different to the table, but collectively we use the various gifts God has given us to foster Saron's faithful and caring congregation, ***Joyfully Sharing God's love for all!!***

In conjunction with the Fall 2025 Stewardship Season, we offered the opportunity for everyone to identify talents they would willingly share for the common good of Saron's mission. And yes, you did respond!

The survey form was divided into ten categories with a total of more than 80 activities for which one could sign up. Although fewer than 60 individual survey forms were returned, more than 570 person-activities were committed. Once again evidence of Saron's innate generosity, a trait that continues to sustain us as we start our 151st year. Thank you!

If you didn't submit a form in the fall, it's not too late. Tabulation and maintenance of the Time & Talent data base will be ongoing and we would gladly incorporate new volunteer data at any time. Contact Claudia Staude (staude.claudia@gmail.com) or Amanda Bradley (info@saronlutheran.org) for details on how to share your talents. As Paul reminded us in the passage above, God's gifts to us are a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Spring 2025 Revisited

At this time last year, as often is the case, we noted that Christian stewardship is much more than making a pledge for the church budget; it is a complete way of life – a life that tries to follow the ways of Jesus. We quoted Lutheran minister W. H. Greever who wrote, *Christian stewardship is the practice of the Christian religion . . . manifested in attitudes and actions.* We also provided Bishop Eaton's message regarding speaking out against injustice: *As a church, we are called to speak up when the government distorts or denies the image of God by endangering access to protection, peace, and daily bread. Where harm or inequity occur, we are called by God to respond with love and advocacy.* Citing Hebrews 10:24, *And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,* we ended with a plea: Speak out! Provoke someone into doing something good.

* * * * *

A year later, Saron is still one of the few places you can go where human beings embodied as the image of God is preached and practiced day in and day out – *All are welcome!* This concept may not always feel present in the media or exist as a priority for some of our nation's leaders, but it is alive and well at Saron. In our individual lives, we are called to act or speak out against injustice, perhaps by attending peaceful protests, by petitioning our representatives to do the right thing, or by joining in various community support actions. We are provoked to do something good!

In the end, it's stewardship – our shared gifts of time, talents, and treasures resulting from our faith – that enables us to provide a witness to the God who made us in God's image, who loves us, who redeems us from our individual and collective failures, and who views every human being as a precious child of incalculable worth. *We love because God first loved us* (1 John 4:19).

Stewardship is what we do after we say we believe.

Don Hafer & Pastor James, for the Stewardship Committee

Worship

ASSISTED HEARING DEVICES

Our sound system in the sanctuary came with headphones to assist those having difficulty hearing the worship service. If you are interested, ask Marcus if you can try one out.

SENSORY BAGS

As part of extending an unconditional welcome to all, we have Sensory Bags available for use. These bags contain a variety of fidgets that can help someone feel more able to sit quietly and/or focus. We also have noise canceling headphones for those who are sound sensitive. These brightly colored bags can be found in the narthex.

PRAYER GROUP

You are invited to offer your concerns or thanksgivings via our attendance cards each Sunday. Requests can also be made online via a link in our Thursday email. You may include as much, or little, detail as you wish. Requests are then given to the Monday prayer group. **You are invited to be part of this Monday group at 11am.** We follow a simple format of morning prayer and insert the petitions and prayers for Saron's ministry and the world. Most weeks we are done in 30 minutes.

ALTAR FLOWERS

Sponsor a week by using the link in the weekly email or by contacting the church office. Please note any occasion/thanksgiving to be recognized in the bulletin. **Flowers are now $40 per vase.** Checks are payable to Saron with "Flowers" as the memo. Take them home to enjoy then please **return the vase.**

Nursery service is available during worship for children under five years old (exceptions are made, especially for siblings). There is a live-feed monitor in the nursery where you may keep up with the service if you need to stay with your child. For children five and older, there are options to bring into the sanctuary, such as clipboards with coloring pages, sensory bags (see article above) and children's bulletins. If you need to step out with them to regroup, there are quiet activities in a bin next to the sofa in the narthex. We embrace family units in all stages and welcome wiggles & giggles as a part of worship.

We recognize the worship experience for families may not look the same for all and encourage sharing concerns and suggestions with Mackenzie Dressander (269/944-7753). Please also contact her if you are willing to volunteer to support this important service.

SUNDAY SCRIPTURE READINGS

As you prepare for worship, you are invited to read and reflect on the Scriptures for the day.

March 1: 2nd Sunday in Lent
Genesis 12:1-4
Psalm 121
Romans 4:1-5, 13-17
John 3:1-17

March 8: 3rd Sunday in Lent
Exodus 17:1-7
Psalm 95
Romans 5:1-11
John 4:5-42

March 15: 4th Sunday in Lent
1 Samuel 16:1-13
Psalm 23
Ephesians 5:8-14
John 9:1-41

March 22: 5th Sunday in Lent
Ezekiel 37:1-14
Psalm 130
Romans 8:6-11
John 11:1-45

March 29: Palm Sunday
Isaiah 50:4-9
Psalm 31:9-16
Philippians 2:5-11
Matthew 26:14—27:66

Youth Group (middle school & high school age) is still trying to work out a schedule for meetings that will work for our busy students/athletes/artists.

Learning

SUNDAY LEARNING HOUR

The Learning Hour offers the following options:

- 9:40am-10:30am Adult Forum: High School - Adult
- 10am-10:45am Confirmation: Grades 6-8
- 10am-10:45am Sunday School: Preschool - Grade 5
    - New Classroom!
    - New Curriculum!
    - New Friends!

We will be sharing the theme for our 2026 VBS soon!

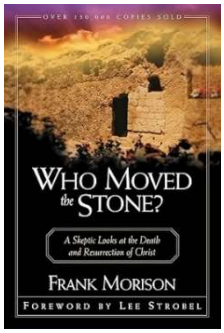
WEDNESDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY

Acts of Faith: Tongues of fire, a *Treasure Island*-style sea voyage, Paul's preaching literally boring a man to death: the book of Acts is a feast of the works of the Holy Spirit! Join our Wednesday morning Bible study as we continue to explore this "act"ion-packed book on **Wednesdays at 9:30am in the upstairs lounge**. No special materials needed. Come when you can! **We will continue to meet throughout Lent.** Contact Pastor James with questions.

TUESDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY

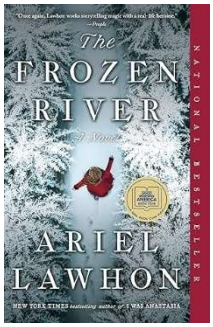
This group breaking for Lent and will return after Easter when we invite you to join us when you can on **Tuesday evenings at 6pm in the upstairs lounge**. We meet for one hour of discussion, then adjourn to a local restaurant for food and fellowship**. We are currently working on selecting our new study topic.** All are welcome!

If you have any questions, feel free to call, text, or email:
Don Hafer (269/985-3637, haferdon@gmail.com)
Ed Staude (636/288-1016, staude.edmund@gmail.com)
Eric Standen (269/759-3556, dande-standen@sbcglobal.net)
Pr. James (269/816-3870, pastorjames@saronlutheran.org)



Sunday, March 1 at 6:30pm in the upstairs lounge, be prepared to pull apart and discuss ***Who Moved the Stone? A Skeptic Looks at the Death and Resurrection of Christ*, by Frank Morrison.** Journalist Morrison had a tremendous drive to learn about Christ. The strangeness of the Resurrection story captured his attention. He set out to prove it was a myth. However, his probing led him to discover the validity of the biblical record. Perfect material to discuss together during Lent.

On **April 12**, the book of the hour is ***Frozen River* by Ariel Lawhon**. This historical mystery is inspired by the diary of Martha Ballard, a renowned 18th century midwife who defied the legal system. At a time when women were best seen and not heard, this is a tense and tender story about a remarkable woman and her legacy.



Please join us for either of both of these book discussions. We end up sharing many different opinions and ideas. All are welcome at any time. Questions? Contact Kathy Cowall at 269/428-0354 or kcowall@hotmail.com.

You can borrow a book, but you get to keep the ideas.
-Good Reads

This group typically meets the 2nd & 4th Sundays of the month at 6:30pm in the upstairs lounge. We are currently breaking for Lent. Watch your emails for topics we'll tackle after Easter!

Contact Ed Staude at 636/288-1016 with any questions or topic suggestions.

DEBORAH CIRCLE

Due to a scheduled Lenten service, Deborah Circle will NOT meet in March. We will be participating in a service project which will be detailed in a future group email.

Contact Melanie at 269/449-8399 with any questions.

March Corner of Cuteness!

We are fortunate to have a great group of enthusiastic Sunday School kiddos who are eager to learn and explore God's Word!

Hospitality

SUNDAY SNACKS

Who doesn't love a snack during a time of fellowship after the service? If you would like to be a Sunday snack host, sign up via the link in our weekly email or call/email the office so Amanda can sign you up. Please plan for at least 30 to partake. Thank you!

Outreach

NOISY OFFERING

We receive a noisy offering (and those not-so-noisy bills) on the first Sunday of each month.
These gifts are sent to ELCA World Hunger.

Saron is consistently ranked as a top 10 contributor to this effort. Thank you for your continued support!

EYE GLASS COLLECTION

Do you have old glasses sitting in a drawer?

The Lions Club has provided a collection box for the narthex. We have several members who are Lions that can deliver our glasses to the club where they will do more good out in our community.

Thank you!

THE BENTON HARBOR SOUP KITCHEN™
HEART-TO-HEART™

Simple food, honestly sourced and lovingly made creates connections, gives fuel to the fight, and starves ignorance and apathy.
-Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen

On February 26, Mary Alice Brunner, Mary Zylema, Rhonda Vitale & friends assembled and delivered 130 sack lunches to the Benton Harbor Soup Kitchen. The lunches included a sandwich, chips, fruit and cookies baked by Kathi Anserello & Steve Bell.

The Soup Kitchen has recently purchased & moved to the former Lark's BBQ on Main Street in Benton Harbor which is under major renovation. During the renovation & until further notice, Saron will be assembling sack lunches at the Red Lotus Nutrition and delivering them to the Soup Kitchen to be distributed to the guests. We would like to thank Red Lotus for allowing us to pack the lunches in their commercial kitchen.

Before the move, we were providing 80 lunches & since the move, we are assembling up to 150 lunches! Because of the increase, we need more people to provide cookies, either homemade or purchased. If you can help, use the link in the weekly email or contact **Kathie Bradley at 269/921-4665**.

Thank you again to all who continue to support this ministry with your time, contributions, and prayers.
Joyfully sharing God's love for all!

INCLUSIVITY TASK FORCE

The Inclusivity Task Force is committed to extending a welcome to all. Our congregation adopted the following welcome statement and is a **Reconciling in Christ** church.

As a community of faith who *joyfully shares God's love for all*, we believe our lives and faith are strengthened by diversity. We strive to be a community who welcomes people of every ability, age, citizenship status, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, language, marital status, political perspective, race, and sexual orientation. We are committed to the work of racial equity. Whatever life's circumstance, we openly welcome and value you. We celebrate God's unconditional love and respond joyfully to your presence here. All are welcome. You are welcome.

If you ever have any questions on our inclusivity journey, please feel free to call any one of the task force members:
Lindsay Gaspari:847/373-8826 lindsay.gaspari@yahoo.com
Meredith Gacek:269/235-4530 meredithgacek@yahoo.com

Interfaith Action

Interfaith Action (swmichiganinterfaith.org) is a coalition of over 40 faith communities in Allegan, Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, and Van Buren Counties. Some members of Saron attend meetings and work with various task force groups. One of the goals of Interfaith Action is to promote understanding and respect for diversity.

Contact Pastor James or Merrily Smith at merrilyannsmith@gmail.com for more information on this group.

Support

The Support Committee typically meets the Tuesday before the third Monday of the month at 8pm via Zoom. Contact Don Hafer with any questions at 269/985-3637.

STOCK DONATIONS

Saron partners with a brokerage firm to accept stock donations. If you would like to donate stock, email Ed Brunner at ebrunner54@gmail.com to receive more information. Thanks!

Facilities

HELPING HANDS

We do all sorts of things from building maintenance to preps for worship in the sanctuary to assembling bulletins and newsletters and so much more. We meet on Wednesdays around 9am and know you are invited – whatever your age, gender, or ability. There is a job for you to use your helping hands!

Miscellaneous Bits of News

New Members Are Joining

We have several people interested in joining our Saron family soon. If you would like to be included, or would like to learn more about Saron and the Lutheran tradition, contact Pastor James at pastorjames@saronlutheran.org.

Did you know the dry fronds from the previous Palm Sunday are burned and used to make the ash for Ash Wednesday? This group does! How cool is that cyclical symbolism?

MARCH 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**2** 11am Prayer Group	**3**	**4** 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study 6:15pm Soup Supper 7pm Prayer	**5** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**6**	**7**
8 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**9** 11am Prayer Group	**10** 8pm Support Meeting	**11** 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study 6:15pm Soup Supper 7pm Prayer	**12** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**13**	**14**
15 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**16** 11am Prayer Group 6pm Council Meeting **Newsletter Articles Due**	**17**	**18** 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study 6:15pm Soup Supper 7pm Prayer	**19** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal	**20**	**21**
22 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**23** 11am Prayer Group	**24**	**25** 9am Helping Hands 9:30am Bible Study 6:15pm Soup Supper 7pm Prayer	**26** 6pm Bells Rehearsal 7pm Choir Rehearsal **Soup Kitchen**	**27**	**28**
29 **PALM SUNDAY** 8:30am Worship 9:40am Adult Learning Hour 10am Youth Learning Hour 11am Worship with Zoom Option	**30** 11am Prayer Group	**31**				

SARON LUTHERAN CHURCH
510 MAIN STREET
ST. JOSEPH, MI 49085

Website: saronlutheran.org
Email: info@saronlutheran.org

A Congregation of:
The North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

MARCH 2026 NEWSLETTER

HOLY WEEK

PALM SUNDAY

March 29 8:30am & 11am

EXCITEMENT

MAUNDY THURSDAY

April 2 7pm

CONFUSION

GOOD FRIDAY

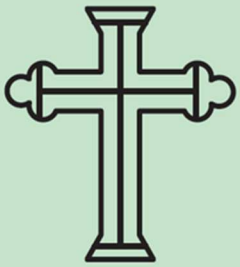
April 3 12:15pm & 7pm

DESPAIR

EASTER VIGIL

April 4 6pm

HOPE



EASTER SUNDAY

April 5 8:30am & 11am

JOY

Our 11am and evening worship services will also be available via Zoom.
There will be an Easter Pancake Breakfast between services with Youth Activities/Egg Hunt beginning around 10:15am.